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Controlling Woodchucks or Groundhogs

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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controlling Woodchucks or Groundhogs

Developed cooperatively by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.



mounds, paths leading from the den to nearby fields, and clawed or girdled trees and shrubs also help identify woodchuck-inhabited burrows and dens.

The presence of skunks can usually be determined by the black droppings containing undigested parts of insects that they deposit on and around the mound.

The openings of fox dens are usually larger and the mounds are fan shaped. Bones and feathers of birds and remains of other animals may be found near the dens used by foxes.

Woodchucks, often called groundhogs, frequently move from untillable land to open pastures, fields, and orchards. In such places they destroy trees and crops. Their burrowing also causes injuries to livestock and damage to machinery when breaking through the undermined ground. Burrows in the earthen parts of levees, bridge abutments, and other water-retaining structures create a danger to human lives and property in times of high water.

Identification of Woodchuck burrows

In the spring, occupied woodchuck burrows are easily recognized due to the habit of woodchucks in keeping them "cleaned out". Fresh dirt is generally found at the mouth of an active burrow in the form of pellets ranging from marble size to clods about as big as the fist. Half-round

Control

Control should be carried out during early spring, since active burrows are easy to find, young woodchucks have not scattered and there is less likelihood of damage to other wildlife. In late summer, fall, and winter, game animals will scurry into woodchuck burrows for brief protection and may even take up permanent abode during the period of woodchuck hibernation.

Woodchucks can be removed from places where they are troublesome by means of fumigants, traps, and shooting. The most practical method for controlling woodchuck damage to crops or pasture land is to gas them in their dens. Around buildings or other high fire hazard areas, trapping and shooting are the best and safest way of controlling these animals.

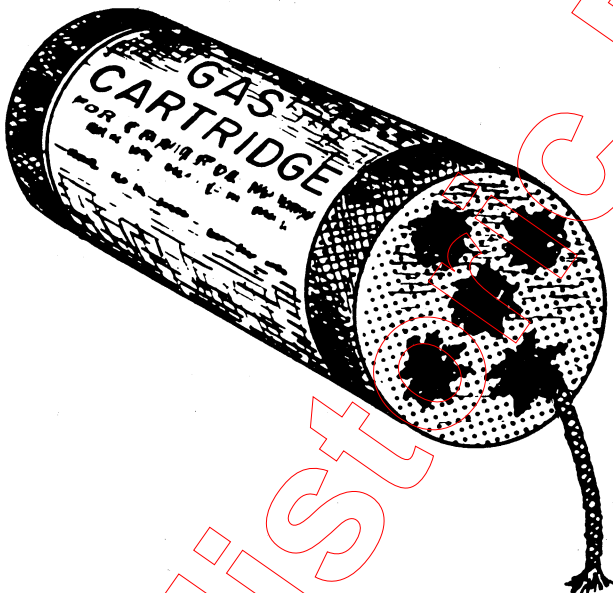
How to Use Gas Cartridges

Gas cartridges are filled with combustible materials and must be ignited by lighting the fuse. They are not bombs and will not explode if properly prepared and used. **CAUTION:** Avoid prolonged breathing of the smoke. Sparks may be thrown, so **DO NOT** use near buildings or other combustible material.

Instructions for Use

(1) With a spade, cut a clump of sod slightly larger than the burrow opening and place it nearby.

(2) Punch five pencil-size holes in the end-cap of the cartridge. Insert fuse, to half its length into one of the holes. The cartridge is now ready to use and should look like the illustration.



(3) Kneel at the burrow opening, light the fuse and immediately place the cartridge as far down the hole as you can. **DO NOT THROW IT.**

(4) Immediately close the burrow opening by placing the sod, grass side down, over the opening to make a tight seal. (Placing sod side down prevents smothering the cartridge with loose dirt).

(5) Stand by for 3 or 4 minutes and watch nearby holes; plug those from which smoke escapes.

Repeat until all burrows are closed.

Trapping

To trap woodchucks, use a No. 2 steel trap or a double-door live trap measuring about 6" x 6" x 19". The steel trap should be set just in front of the burrow entrance. Dig out the place where the trap is to be set so the pan is flush with, or just below, the soil surface.

The trap jaw hinge should be parallel to the trail. The pan should be covered with a piece of cloth to prevent dirt from getting under it. A few twigs stuck in the ground on both sides of the trail between the burrow entrance and the trap will help guide the woodchuck into the trap. Do not stake the trap down. There will be much less chance of the animal escaping the trap if a drag is used. A three or four foot length of 2" x 4" makes an excellent trap drag. The trap should be attached to the center of the 2" x 4" with about two feet of chain.

The live trap should be set in the trail in front of the burrow. It can be baited with a few lettuce leaves. Both doors on the trap should be open.

Shooting

Shooting provides sport, and may be effective depending upon the area and interest by hunters.